

Seminar: Nelson Mandela and South Africa

CQ: What is Nelson Mandela's legacy?



*“For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains,
but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”
~ Nelson Mandela*

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On May 10, 1994, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela became the first black president of the Republic of South Africa after historic elections that, for the first time in the nation's history, included all citizens regardless of race. Why and how he rose to this position as leader of the nation began decades earlier as a lawyer and young leader of the African National Congress (ANC). These years involved arrests, surveillance of his movements, and he eventually chose to flee the country to avoid imprisonment or even worse. In 1964, Mandela and other members of the ANC were arrested for allegedly planning a violent attack against the apartheid government and were sentenced to life in prison. Mandela spent nearly 30 years behind bars—most of them on Robben Island off the coast of South Africa—and international pressure for his release swelled during the 1980s.

Mandela's legacy as an activist, leader, and international icon for his work to end apartheid, however, is not a settled issue. How should Mandela be remembered? How do the beliefs he espoused as a political activist compare with his actions as President? How have Mandela's decisions during his one term as president and his influence over ANC policy until his death in 2013 affected the people of South Africa?

Organized around the compelling question "**What is Nelson Mandela's legacy?**", this collection of primary sources offers an opportunity for students to learn about and discuss who Nelson Mandela was, what he believed, and how others have responded to the effect his actions and policies have had on the nation's development.



For this seminar, students will:

- Analyze primary and secondary sources to identify differing perspectives on the implementation and outcomes of Reconstruction.
- Evaluate policies, laws, and proposed solutions to key issues of Reconstruction, including labor rights, voting, land ownership, public safety, and political representation.
- Evaluate the extent to which decisions made during Reconstruction continue to influence social, political, economic, and cultural practices, institutions, and perspectives today.
- Participate in a seminar to discuss interpretations of the documents and consider the perspectives expressed by fellow participants before establishing a position on the CQ.

Note: Each document title includes a hyperlink to the original document and/or supplemental materials to support further inquiry.

Context: Resources available at EDSITEment include a timeline and overview of apartheid in South Africa that can provide context for this collection of documents and related discussions.

Key terms: apartheid, reconciliation, non-cooperation, amnesty

Document One. "The Struggle is My Life," press statement issued by Nelson Mandela on 26 June 1961.

"In the history of our country no political campaign has ever merited the serious attention and respect which the Nationalist government gave us. When a government seeks to suppress a peaceful demonstration of an unarmed people by mobilising the entire resources of the State, military and otherwise, it concedes powerful mass support for such a demonstration. Could there be any other evidence to prove that we have become a power to be reckoned with and the strongest opposition to the government? Who can deny the plain fact that ever since the end of last month the issue that dominated South African politics was not the republican celebrations, but our plans for a general strike?..."

You will remember that the Pietermaritzburg Resolutions warned that if the government did not call a National Convention before the end of May, 1961, Africans, Coloureds, Indians and European democrats would be asked not to collaborate with the republic or any government based on force. On several occasions since then the National Action Council explained that the last strike marked the beginning of a relentless mass struggle for the defeat of the Nationalist government, and for a sovereign multi-racial convention. We stressed that the strike would be followed by other forms of mass pressure to force the race maniacs who govern our beloved country to make way for a democratic government of the people, by the people and for the people. A full-scale and countrywide campaign of non-cooperation with the government will be launched immediately. The precise form of the contemplated action, its scope and dimensions and duration will be announced to you at the appropriate time."

Document Two. Address by State President P. W. Botha (the "Rubicon Speech") at the opening of the National Party Natal Congress in Durban, South Africa, 15 August 1985.

"I am not prepared to lead White South Africans and other minority groups on a road to abdication and suicide. Destroy White South Africa and our influence, and this country will drift into faction strife, chaos and poverty...From certain international as well as local quarters, appeals are being made to me to release Mr Nelson Mandela from jail. I stated in Parliament, when put this question, that if Mr Mandela gives a commitment that he will not make himself guilty of planning, instigating or committing acts of violence for the furtherance of political objectives, I will, in principle, be prepared to consider his release. But let me remind the public of the reasons why Mr Mandela is in jail. I think it is absolutely necessary that we deal with that first of all. When he was brought before court in the sixties, the then Attorney-General, Dr Yutar, set out the State's case inter alia as follows:

"As the indictment alleges, the accused deliberately and maliciously plotted and engineered the commission of acts of violence and destruction throughout the country...The planned purpose thereof was to bring about in the Republic of South Africa chaos, disorder and turmoil...They (Mr Mandela and his friends) planned violent insurrection and rebellion." The saboteurs had planned the manufacture of at least seven types of bombs: 48 000 anti-personnel mines, 210 000 hand grenades, petrol bombs, pipe bombs, syringe bombs and bottle bombs."

The violence of our enemies is a warning to us. We, who are committed to peaceful negotiation, also have a warning to them. Our warning is that our readiness to negotiate should not be mistaken for weakness.

I have applied much self-discipline during the past weeks and months. I have been lenient and patient. Don't push us too far in your own interests, I tell them..."

Document Three. African National Congress and Nationalist Party agreement: The Record of Understanding (1992).

"In previous negotiations, De Klerk's government had been pushing for a two-phase transition, with an appointed transitional government with a rotating presidency. The ANC pushed instead for a transition in a single stage to majority rule. The ANC compromised with the National Party's demands by agreeing to:

The GNU would include all parties which obtained over 5% of the vote in democratic elections for the first five years. This meant that the National Party was sure to be included. The term 'sunset clause' was used for this compromise. It allowed the gradual phasing out of white rule rather than one dramatic handover of power."

Document Four. Introduction to Volume One of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report. Volume 1, chapter 1, p. 7 (29 October, 1998).

"In our case, dealing with the past means knowing what happened. Who ordered that this person should be killed? Why did this gross violation of human rights take place? We also need to know about the past so that we can renew our resolve and commitment that never again will such violations take place. We need to know about the past in order to establish a culture of respect for human rights. It is only by accounting for the past that we can become accountable for the future. For all these reasons, our nation, through those who negotiated the transition from apartheid to democracy, chose the option of individual and not blanket amnesty. And we believe that this individual amnesty has demonstrated its value. One of the criteria to be satisfied before amnesty could be granted was full disclosure of the truth. Freedom was granted in exchange for truth. We have, through these means, been able to uncover much of what happened in the past."

Document Five. State of the Nation Address by President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, Cape Town (24 May 1994).

"As a signal of its seriousness to address these, the government will, within the next 100 days, implement various projects under the direct supervision of the President. Let me briefly mention these.

Children under the age of six and pregnant mothers will receive free medical care in every state hospital and clinic where such need exists. Similarly, a nutritional feeding scheme will be implemented in every primary school where such need is established. A concrete process of consultation between the major stakeholders in this area will be organised immediately. A programme is already being implemented to electrify 350 000 homes during the current financial year.

A campaign will be launched at every level of government, a public works programme designed and all efforts made to involve the private sector, organised labour, the civics and other community organisations to rebuild our townships, restore services in rural and urban areas, while addressing the issue of job creation and training, especially for our unemployed youth."

Document Six. "Nelson Mandela: neither sell-out nor saint" Zakes Mda (6 December 2013).

"The distribution of that prosperity was very skewed. South Africa has never been a place of equal opportunity, and that was reinforced instead of changed by Mandela's presidency. His focus on the symbols and atmospherics of reconciliation was at the expense of real economic reform. The disillusionment of young black South Africans began when he was president. So, did the unbridled accumulation of wealth by the ruling party apparatchiks, accompanied by the marginalisation of all those deemed to lack "struggle credentials." While cadres of the party gained positions of power and wealth, both in the public and private sectors, the rest of the black population remained poor and unemployed."

Document Seven. "What Mandela did, wasn't satisfying" Ghamolelo Thobile Masweu, 2018. (Video)



Secondary source document: "Think Again, Nelson Mandela" John Campbell, December 6, 2013.

"Most of the commonly accepted narratives about the new South Africa are based on the misconception that apartheid was ended by a "freedom struggle" led by Mandela and his presidential successor, Thabo Mbeki, with international sanctions playing an important role. The less heroic reality is that apartheid's demise was the result of a political deal between advocates of change and the white establishment, led by de Klerk. This deal, enshrining property rights and the rule of law, largely preserved the economic privileges enjoyed by white South Africans. The anti-apartheid resistance, both violent and nonviolent, never posed a serious challenge to the country's security services (though it could make townships ungovernable). As a result, the final bargain reflected that balance of power, and the wholesale reconstruction of the economy to right the wrongs of apartheid was never a realistic option."

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Organizer for Seminar Discussion

Doc. #	Summary	Connect to other documents	New questions

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Seminar Notes: